

*MBS 03-05*

Latent Algebraic Structure in American Religious Belief, 1988-1998

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We here perform an analysis of latent algebraic structure on selected items from the 1988 and 1998 General Social Survey religion modules. American religious belief over the period is shown to be stable, with a complex structure which is reducible neither to a set of distinct scales nor to a model of itemwise independence. A decomposition of observed belief items into microbeliefs reveals underlying connections between otherwise disparate items, and demonstrates the presence of several interlocking scale-like structures. Interpretations of the resultant latent structures are provided, and some connections with the memetic theory of religion are discussed.

*Keywords:* religious beliefs, microbelief analysis, latent class analysis, meme theory